

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on the Little Spearfish Canyon and Bismarck Land Exchange Proposal

What is the footprint of the proposed Spearfish Canyon State Park?

This proposed 1,600-acre state park includes property in the Little Spearfish Canyon area. It would include the Savoy fishing pond, Spearfish Falls, Roughlock Falls and up Little Spearfish Canyon to the Little Spearfish trailhead. It does not include the bulk of Spearfish Canyon which includes the property north of Savoy to Spearfish. It will include much of the “rim to rim” of Little Spearfish Canyon. Please see included map.

How do South Dakota citizens benefit from a state park in Little Spearfish Canyon?

Visitation continues to increase in Little Spearfish Canyon. Visitors are seeking more than a scenic drive – they want to get out of their cars and have a meaningful experience. This plan will create a new state park that has more recreational opportunities and better facilities.

The South Dakota Department of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) has a proven track record of managing natural resources to both preserve their integrity while providing maximum access for those who wish to experience these treasures. With the state acquisition of Roughlock Falls in 2006 and Spearfish Falls in 2016, GFP was able to make immediate improvements to solidify uninterrupted access to these sites while reversing environmental degradation.

With the new Spearfish Canyon State Park, we can build upon those successes and preserve them as part of our heritage, and also be responsible stewards to allow for public enjoyment.

Is the State is going to charge to drive down U.S. Highway 14A in Spearfish Canyon?

No, there will not be a fee to drive down U.S. Highway 14A in Spearfish Canyon. In 1989, the drive along U.S. Highway 14A was designated as a scenic byway by the U.S. Forest Service and a state scenic byway by the State of South Dakota.

What is the process for State Park designation?

Once the land trade is finalized, a bill will be brought before the South Dakota State Legislature to create and designate the area as a state park.

What is the master planning process and what will it achieve?

The master planning process will:

- Provide the public and area stakeholders an opportunity to comment on concepts and make recommendations to assist in establishing a plan.

- Establish a clear vision for Spearfish Canyon State Park and Bismarck Lake, based on a detailed inventory of the areas and consideration of existing and potential opportunities. The final master plan will provide guidance on natural resource management, cultural and historical resource protection, scenic preservation, interpretation and appropriate development standards.
- Explore all funding opportunities that can be generated through services inside and outside the park areas, and provide options for short- and long-term operations of the areas according to the goals identified in the master plan.
- Provide an outline and schedule for all required state and federal actions. The plan will consider all administrative, legislative, and fiscal requirements to achieve the identified recommendations and provide the state with strategies and action items to secure all permissions and authority necessary for the implementation of the plan.

When will the master planning process begin?

The master planning process is in its early stages and will likely continue into summer 2017. A consultant has been selected and scheduling for the public input process is underway. The public input sessions will begin in mid-October 2016. The process is beginning now so that GFP can be ready to move forward with effectively managing the Little Spearfish Canyon and Bismarck Lake areas once the land trade is complete.

Is the State of South Dakota going to develop Bismarck Lake?

No, the state is not going to develop Bismarck Lake. GFP may seek to improve the campground by adding a modern comfort station (flush toilets, sinks, and showers).

What is the state going to do with Camp Bob Marshall on Bismarck Lake?

The state wants to keep it the same as it is today. Visitors appreciate the rustic beauty of Camp Bob Marshall and many groups that use the camp appreciate it for what it currently offers – in its current form. GFP does plan to fix the sewer lagoon, a necessary upgrade to protect and improve the environment and provide for human safety.

Would visitors pay to access an area that is already free to the public? If so, how much?

Bismarck Lake visitors currently pay an access fee. Guests staying at Bismarck Lake pay \$26 dollars per night for a non-electric campsite without a comfort station (flush toilets, sinks and showers). Similar sites at Custer State Park are \$19 per night. Day users at Bismarck Lake pay a daily fee of \$4 or an annual fee of \$20. The South Dakota State Park annual pass (\$30) is good across the state, at all state parks and recreation areas.

In Little Spearfish Canyon visitors pay a \$12 per night camping fee; it's likely that GFP would charge a similar rate. Any other potential fees would be considered as part of the master

planning process. As with all state park fees, this public process would require the approval of the citizens on the state Game, Fish, and Parks Commission.

Would the proposed land exchange circumvent the National Environment Policy Act (NEPA)?

No. NEPA applies to the proposed land exchange.

Do Native American tribes have an opportunity to comment on the proposed land exchange?

Yes, through the master planning process there will be various meetings, a venue for written comments, and public input sessions. Additionally, tribal members will have an opportunity to participate in the NEPA process.

Did the state consult the Forest Service on the proposed land exchange?

Yes, over the last eleven months the State of South Dakota has had numerous conversations with U.S. Forest Service officials about the proposed Little Spearfish Canyon and Bismarck Lake land exchange.

Those discussions started on November 1, 2015, when South Dakota GFP Parks Director Doug Hofer spent several hours explaining and discussing the proposed exchange with then-Black Hills National Forest Supervisor Craig Bobzien. A few months later, GFP Secretary Kelly Hepler and Director Hofer also presented the plan in another meeting to Supervisor Bobzien and USFS National Grasslands Supervisor Kevin Atchley. This past March, Secretary Hepler discussed the land exchange with U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell and followed up with a letter. There are other examples of the state reaching out to the Forest Service for comment. Throughout the meetings, USFS staff have repeatedly said that it is Forest Service policy to withhold comment on legislation until it is officially introduced. A detailed timeline can be found at this web link:

<http://gfp.sd.gov/news/news/september/SpearfishCanyonLandExchangeTimeline.pdf>.

Since the Forest Service has a land-transfer process, why is legislation needed?

There are many different ways that a land transfer can take place. The Forest Service's preferred approach can take 10 years or more. It is highly bureaucratic and slow. The legislative land trade process is timely, results driven, and engages the public. It is not uncommon for the federal government to approve land transfers in this way.

How will the lands the state is proposing to trade benefit the federal government?

Large contiguous tracts of land are more valuable because they are more efficient to manage. The proposed trade will create larger contiguous tracts of land for the Forest Service and the

State of South Dakota. The three state School and Public Land (SPL) parcels and the GFP-owned Spearfish Canyon parcel are completely or nearly surrounded by USFS National Grasslands. This land exchange will create more efficient land management for the federal government.

Shouldn't the land exchanged between the Forest Service and the State be of equal value?

Yes, the land must be of equal value and the bill requires the parcels to be appraised at their agricultural value. The legislation limits the land acquired by the state to be “managed by the state for public recreation uses and the conservation of natural resources” in perpetuity. That limitation of land use ensures that the new state land will be protected and open to the public, but it also substantially lowers the value of that land. When the land exchange is completed the state will never be able to develop the proposed Spearfish Canyon State Park and Bismarck Lake parcels into commercial developments, such as shopping centers or vacation homes. The state wants to preserve and protect these properties.

“Agricultural value” makes sense for these appraisals, because it is the best representation of how this land will be used. It does not make sense to consider the “highest and best use” value, which would include use of the land for commercial development, when this type of development is prohibited by the legislation.

Would the School and Public Lands lose money with this land exchange?

No, the Office of School and Public Lands (SPL) will benefit from the exchange, leading to additional funding for K-12 education. The lease rate of all three parcels totals \$5,676.80 per year. According to SDSU Extension's [“South Dakota Agricultural Land Market Trends”](#) annual report, at average rangeland value the parcels should be worth approximately \$2 million total.

To initiate the purchase, GFP will purchase the land at the appraised value from SPL, after which it will be traded to the Forest Service. SPL will deposit the \$2 million in the land sale proceeds into the SPL K-12 School Trust Fund. A conservative estimate for an annual return on those funds would be \$60,000 a year – ten times the current lease rate.